



# SURPUR PAINTING: REGIONAL ART STYLE OF KARNATAKA

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## INTRODUCTION

Surpur is a taluka place in the newly created Yadgiri district. Once this area was popular by Gosala dynasty. It is also called Sagarnad of Surapura Nadu. The rulers of Surpur came from Ratnagiri, established the dynasty in Vaginagiri. When Surpur city was built, they transferred their capital from Vaginagiri to Surpur. They ruled over the region for two hundred (1636-1858) years. It is important to mention that they gave patronage to Visual Art. Garudadri family came to Surpur in 1750 and they became the court painters. The paintings of this period are found in many states and they became famous at the International level. The fame of Surpur and Surpur art found place in the western countries.

Surpur rulers were known for their magnanimity and liberally helped the artists with Jahagirs and Inams. Garudadri family is one of them to get Jahagirs from the rulers.

**Garudadri family:** The family came from Chitivel Agrahar in Andhra Pradesh and held a position in the court of Surpur. They also became the priests of Sri Venugopala swamy temple. The king awarded Jahagirs of about 200 acres. Now also it is regarded as Garudadri land. The land records are also in their name. Before coming to Surpur, they were known as Vermas. This name can be seen in the works of Kamalaiah, the son of Banaiah. At the bottom of the paintings his name is written as 'Jahagirdar Kalal Verma'. The family got the name Garudadri during the period of Benakaiah, the son of Chitivelaiah.

**Court Painters:** Chitivelaiah had got 3 sons-Benakaiah, Sungaraiah and Appiah. Only Benakaiah took the art as a profession.

Benakaiah was expert both in the painting and sculpture. From his time the family came to be called Garudadri. Benakaiah had got 3 sons-Banaiah, Yenkaiah and Narasiah. Only Banaiah knew the art, others didn't. He is known as Banaiah I, was great painter from his time. Kamalaiah is the first son of Banaiah I, for some time he was in Raichur. His paintings are found in the Killemath and in Hanuman temple in Maddipet.

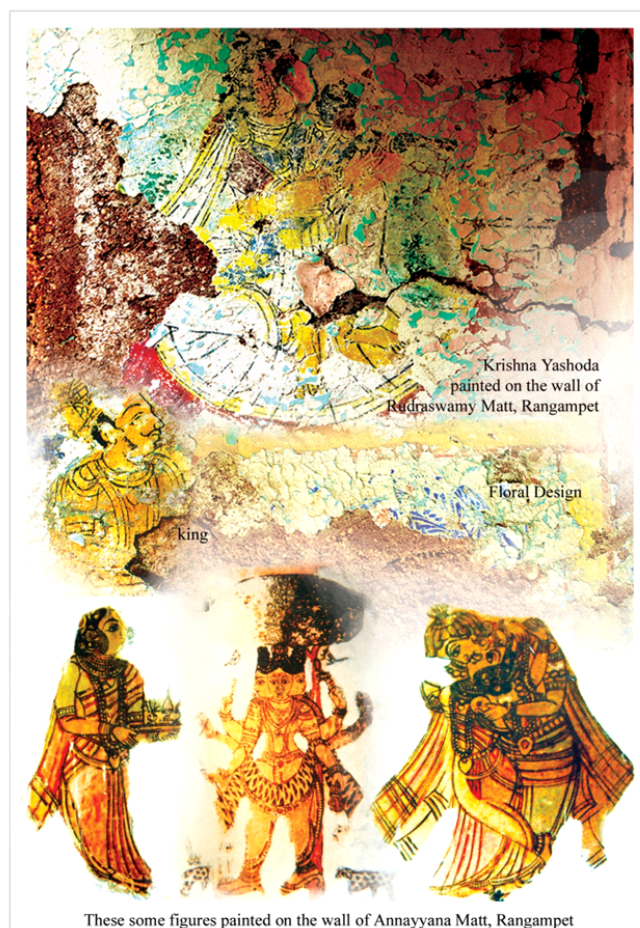
Banaiah II, is the only son of Kamalaiah. He also became expert in the field. After the death of his father, he came to Hyderabad with Venkataramaiah and settled there. His sons and grandsons are still living here. At first he got a position in Salarjung Museum and then opportunities came to him. In 1951 he worked for the Nirmal Industries. He was invited by Delhi administration to make paintings in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. In 1954 he completed the paintings and decoration of the furniture. The secretary of Indian President Md. Ghaffran gave him an appreciation letter for their works.

Techniques of using photographs in the traditional painting is

found in Banaiah II's paintings. Such paintings can be found in the houses of rich people of Adoni. The photographs used for painting were taken during 1920-50. At the bottom of the painting his name is written as B.G.S. (*Banaiah Garudadri Shorapur*). In 1950 he was honoured both by Nizam and private organizations. Banaiah II breathed his last on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1966. National award was declared in 1967. Smt Narasamma, his wife received it. After him the Surpur art came to a standstill.

**Description of paintings according to the medium:** Surpur paintings can be divided into three categories. a. the paintings on the walls, b. the manuscript paintings, c. the paintings on the paper and cardboard.

**Wall Paintings:** There is only one wall painting in the new palace of Surpur. Many paintings are available in Annayyana matt and Rudraswamy matt in Rangampet.



Paintings in Annayyana matt-Trimurti, Kichaka Vadhe, Monkeys eating mangoes. Samudra mathana, Krishana as Gouliga, The women with lamps, The doors and windows and



their frames are decorated with designs.

The structures of Annayyana matt and Rudraswamy matt are same. But Rudraswamy matt in dilapidated state.

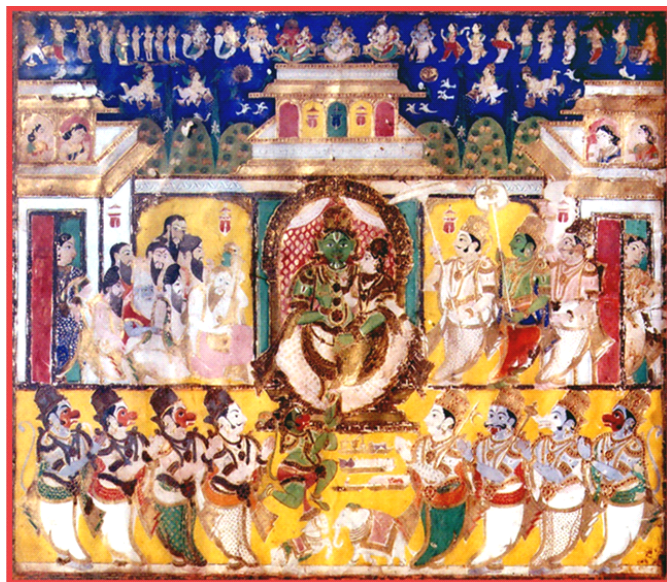
Paintings in Rudraswamy matt-Yuvaraja, flower plants and creepers and decorative trees. Evens relating to Krishan and Yashoda in the miniature form. They are super considering their drawing and their shine.

**Manuscript Paintings:** Papaiah Shastri a great poet of the time who wrote *Asta Digbandhana* relating to Surpur Nayakas. This manuscript is full of Banaiah's miniature figures. The royal emblems, sword, palanquin fish and conch are symbolic to the writings of Digbandhana.

*Jaimini Bharata* written by Lakshmisha is found in the Sagarnad in the form of manuscript. There are miniature figures. At the end it says this is completed in 1801. The episodes of Mahabharata are drawn and on the other side situations are described.

*Chennabasava Purana* painted manuscript available in Sagarnad about 200 years old, is with Garupadashetty in Kasaba Lingsugur. The elders of the family say that original manuscript is given to Gulbarga University Manuscript collection twenty years back. The professor got it zeroxed only one side and the other side left off. So only miniature paintings are available. But any how with this finding we can see the rich legacy of the Garudadris to the field of art.

In the Chennabasava Purana these are the paintings pertaining to the following episodes – The court of lord Shiva, The dream of Akka Nagamma, Parvati asking questions to Shiva, Kondis explaining to Bijjala, Playfulness of Chennabasa, Pushpakotsava, Daksha samhara, Basavanna coming to Bijjala, The description of the rise of the moon, Picture of the prostitute street, Basavanna welcoming siddharama, Uma Maheshwara-Vrishabha vahana lile, Urilinga Udbhava, Ardhanarishwara lile, Incarnation of Veerabhadra, The birthplace and dwellings of the living and non living beings, Conferring Chakra on Vishnu, Gaja samhara, Tripurantaka samhara, Tarakasura samhara, Manmatha dahana.

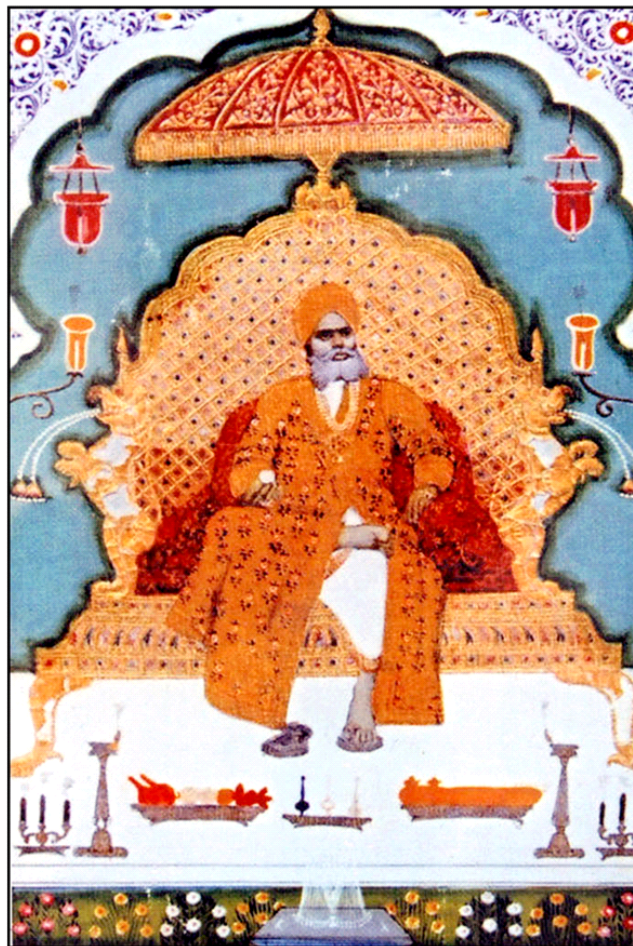


**Paintings on Panchanga:** Pandint Ramashastry of Hebbal was a great astrologer. He composed Panchanga. The painters of the court created pictures for the Panchanga. Some Panchangas are available even today. The family launches Panchanga every

year. As Garudadris were court painters the painted pictures according to the wishes of the king ministers and officials. After the decline of the rulers. They painted the pictures for the rich, officials and nobles. It is noteworthy that all the paintings are not the same in style and composition.

**Techniques of Paintings:** The paintings on the cardboard are of good quality. They are in the miniature form. Only a few colours are used still they have used new designs and decorations. The human figures wearing special dress, ornaments, saree, the turban, the borders of the shalyas and the blouses are very beautiful. The beauty of the gods and goddesses, the halos in the background the crowns, designs, the use of gold colour to the planks is immense. The delicate linings around the picture give spiritual value. These figures are like the figures of Lepakshi in same measure. The weight of the body is not shown on the legs still they are lively and emotive.

Benakaiah and Banaiah, were experts in sculpture. So they have created paintings applying the principles of sculpture. The delicate linings designs composition of the figures, the use of the golden colour are same salient features. The pink yellow dark blue red and gold colour on the model of jesso are used. The arch of the halos, the human figures get vibrance due, to the use of dark blue in the background. Hanging decorative lamps, the gold plate in the front, the flower vase add beauty to the whole composition which is the special feature of the Surpur art.



Three phases can be ascertained from the study of the paintings. The initial style follow the foot prints of Vijayanagara style. The annisseurs also agree with this. The new style was developed later between 1752 to 1858 with the pictures we find hanging decorative lamps, the halos having designs and the space gaps in between. In the last phase there is an amalgamation of Mugual, Hyderabad Company and the local style. Number of paintings

are available of this period.

We have to be grateful to Meadows Taylor. He is the contemporary to the Gardadrir. He was a statesman, a geologist and a litterateur. He introduced the Surpur art in the western countries. In 1850 Taylor Introduced photography in Surpur. The officials and the rich class took the opportunity. Number of photos of this period are available. Banaiah I, did the miniature painting using photographs. Such techniques was nowhere used except by Surpur painters.

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